DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 275 165 FL 016 069

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TITLE The Construction of a Modular Thematic Task Bound English Language Achievement Test Battery for Kuwait.
PUB DATE 84
NOTE 17p.; In: Practice and Problems in Language Testing. Papers from the International Symposium on Language Testing (7th, Colchester, England, 1984); see FL 016 066.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Communicative Competence (Languages); Elementary Secondary Education; *English (Second Language); Foreign Countries; *Language Proficiency; *Language Tests; Research Projects; *Test Construction; Testing Problems
IDENTIFIERS Great Britain; *Kuwait

ABSTRACT

This paper reports the development of a test battery to replace the structural testing used in Kuwait to assess skills acquired in the communicatively-based Crescent English Course. A list of activities and tasks required of students at level six was drawn from the course syllabus, and four modules containing clusters of integrated language tasks linked by a theme and based on English language situations encountered in Kuwait were designed. Each module contains four tasks with specific skill objectives and two possible configurations to provide alternative test forms. Pilot testing was done in 10 Kuwaiti and 2 British secondary schools, for validation and to obtain a performance model. The scoring system and procedures were expanded and standardized based on those results. Validity and reliability of the battery are being investigated. (MSE)

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THE CONSTRUCTION OF A MODULAR THEMATIC TASK BOUND ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACHIEVEMENT TEST BATTERY FOR KUWAIT

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FL 016 069

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THE CONSTRUCTION OF A MODULAR THEMATIC TASK BOUND ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACHIEVEMENT TEST BATTERY FOR KUWAIT

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to present a research progress report on the developmental stages, the construction process, the administration procedures and assessment scales of a Modular Thematic Task Bound English Language Achievement Test Battery for Kuwait.

An assessment of the need for such a battery will be attempted as well as a description of its modules, themes, tasks and the criteria used for the sampling of these tasks from the syllabus and course objectives.

Samples of the battery tasks and the administration and scoring manual accompanying it will be given as well as the task analysis and componential inventory. The pilot scheme and validation process planned for this battery will also be reported on.

The Research and its Aims

The construction of this battery is part of a Ph.D. research programme conducted by the researcher and has been in progress at the Language Centre of Exeter University since October, 1981. The aims of this research are:-

1. an investigation into the types of tests appropriate to assess the English language achievement of students of English as a first foreign language studying the "Crescent English Course", (ELTA, O.U.P., 1977-) at the mid-secondary school level of general education in Kuwait,

2. the production of relevant and appropriate guidelines for future test construction by teachers and inspectors at all levels of general education in Kuwait, and

3. on the basis of an assessment of the currently practised testing policies, techniques and systems used there, the research broadly aims as well at initiating a basic overhaul of the testing and examinations approach within a framework of integrated educational reform of curricula in general, and ELT in particular.

Recent ELT Development in Kuwait and the "Crescent English Course"

As a phase of the educational development movement in Kuwait, the Ministry of Education there decided in 1976 on a redefinition of the ELT objectives in the country. That decision was a result of:

(a) A 3 year research into the outcomes of the then used structurally-based course. That research highlighted a considerable dissatisfaction with that course on the parts of educationists, parents and learners in terms of the levels of achievement in English at that time which were very low.

(b) A recognition of the need for a communicative approach to ELT in which the notional and functional values of language use should be focused as the only alternative for the ELT syllabus to meet the requirements of societal movement and the learner's needs.

Hence, the ELT objectives in Kuwait were redefined through a research process and democratic procedures, specifically emphasizing:

(a) the integration of language skills in a classroom context of activity and variety

(b) the placement of the learner at the centre of the educational process

(c) the use of authentic language teaching/learning materials as much as possible within the constraints of the classroom situation

(d) the integration of multi-media with study-materials

(e) the development of an attitude to learners' errors acknowledging their transitional competence

(f) functionalism in the design and assignment of teaching/learning experiences

(g) auto-learning or self-study strategies.

The Crescent English Course (henceforth CEC) by ELTA/O.U.P. was introduced to Kuwait initially as a project for the development of ELT, which was basically concordant with the new orientations in the educational scene at that time. Later, the CEC materials were introduced to Kuwait as tentative representations of an English language teaching syllabus for the Arab World. As O'Neill and Snow (1977) stated in the introduction to these materials, they are based on:

"the current appreciation of the communicative nature of language and on an understanding of the implications this has for teaching and learning."

O'Neill, T. & P. Snow, 1977
"Crescent English Course: Teacher's Book 1"
p. 1, ELTA - O.U.P., 1977, 1978, 1982.

The concerned Institutions of the Ministry of Education, Kuwait* spent four years analysing and experimenting with the CEC materials to decide on their suitability and relevance to the ELT objectives for general education in the country. *The writer reported on this process in detail elsewhere. Finally, the course has been fully adopted as the official ELT course in the general education curriculum of the State, where English is taught starting from the beginning of the Intermediate stage, i.e. the 5th year of schooling, to the end of the secondary stage, i.e. the 12th and final year of schooling. The school ladder in Kuwait consists of twelve years divided equally into three stages, Primary, Intermediate and Secondary and English is a general requirement subject for two thirds of this time. Throughout the eight years English is given an average of five lessons a week. The CEC is a series of eight levels, each for one of the eight years of the ELT programme. The course components for each level comprise:

A Teacher's Book
A Pupil's Book
A Pupil's Reference book. (Applicable to the secondary stage)
A Pupil's Workbook
Recorded Materials: Class and Pupil's Cassettes
O.H.P. Transparencies
Supplementary Readers

The materials are arranged for each level in Units sub-divided into steps, the aims of which are stated at the beginning of each one. The course is claimed to be activity-based emphasizing communication, socialization, individualization and enjoyment.

The Need for the Battery

It may be worth mentioning here that a paradoxical situation currently exists in Kuwait where learners are taught to learn English by a communicatively-based approach whilst they are still being tested to a considerable extent as they were being tested in the light of the structurally-based approach. (1) It is not a happy situation in which pupils, albeit unintentionally, are unfairly tested, and teachers are at a loss when it comes to communicatively-based language tests. The missing link in the whole process of ELT syllabus development there is testing. Besides, testing and testing policies in Kuwait have always been a problem

* See Baghdady, M.I., (1982, a,b,c) in Bibliography

calling for solution. Apart from some ad hoc specimen tests provided by the course writers, and similar ad hoc tests produced by some teachers and some attempts on the part of Inspectors at setting up tests to match the new approach, the question of testing in the light of the new Syllabus is yet without a satisfactory answer.

The Rationale of its construction

The battery is meant to be 1. relevant to its purpose as an achievement test with the course objectives as the frame of reference, 2. reflective of learners' state of learning, 3. revisory of syllabus through its expected feedback on the course outcome, 4. referential in the sense that performance elicited is contextualized, and 5. rateable, i.e. profiling achievement.

It is also based on level 6 of the CEC (i.e. the second year secondary which is the mid-secondary school level) as a prototype for the other levels in the series, demonstrating a methodological approach that is applicable to the other levels in the series pre- and post-level 6. Thus, the current battery which is trying to assess level 6's input could be considered a model for testing which, with slight modifications, could be adaptable to lower or higher levels. Performance and accountability are targets for this battery in the sense that it is intended to gauge the outcomes of a specific course of study, a defined set of experiences in terms of the learners' attainment of a certain performance level in language (i.e. a course-oriented achievement test). It is also designed hopefully to provide a fair scale to base decisions of learners' promotion from one level into another depending on the learner's achievement of the syllabus/course objectives. It is also hoped that this battery provides qualitative and quantitative feedback data for the evaluation, remediation and further development of the syllabus and the quality of training in particular. Most important is the endeavour to construct this battery of language tasks which can be tested, are fairly objectivized without resorting to the multiple choice format whilst providing considerable elicitation of language productivity on the part of the learner/testee at the specified level. Because it is communication oriented it is production based as well, since communication in language is, in a sense, synonymous to language production. This is why the central aim of the battery is to go beyond the lower order level of mere recognition to the elicitation of varied samples of the learners' purposeful production of the language in a clearly detailed context where the learner/testee has got a task to perform. It is also meant to be personalizing in the sense that it addresses the testee in person stimulating him/her to play a role in language activities bringing up his/her personality in performance. Hence, instructions are worded as friendly requests. Local and national environment is evident throughout the battery and the various tasks and situations are true to the testee's life and age so that the battery will appeal to the subjects.

The Construction Process

Because of the test specificity (i.e. an achievement test of a specific level of a specific course for specific students), the sampling of tasks is necessarily from what is there in the course with which the testees are familiar. The syllabus and course objectives are the criteria and "record of the outcome". (Cronbach, 1964: 108). Looking through levels 1-6 of the CEC and getting the type of model for what is being taught, the content of the course in that sense dictated the kinds of tasks required by the test. So, the types of activities and tasks assigned by the course were listed for a complete framework then concentrating on level 6 for a detailed componential inventory in terms of tasks and activities. After preparing a basic statement about what students should be able to do at the end of level 6, sampling of these tasks was done implementing the following sampling criteria:-

(a) Surveyability: i.e. representative of broad abilities.

(b) Clearness: i.e. freedom from tricks and ambiguities.

(c) Proportionality: i.e. attempting a balance between and among tasks.

(d) Conciseness: i.e. spatio-temporally economical.

(e) Pragmaticality: i.e. true to life, useful and usable authenticated tasks within a framework of concessions to peculiarities of classroom situation.

The battery then was arranged in four modules under the general theme: "In-Kuwait English" indicating that the language situations in the test are types of the situations where English is used in the Kuwaiti society. Of course the situations sampled in the battery are not exhaustive but representative. If some of the situations devised for the tasks seem a bit contrived, it is certainly the result of the restrictions imposed by the limitations of the classroom situation.

Each module deals with a cluster of integrated language tasks interlinked by a modular theme which is consistently kept and observed all through the module. By module is meant an independent and self-contained unit of integrated constructional components.

The battery was discussed in manuscript in detail by a committee at the language centre established for this particular purpose and comprising linguists, educationists and expert testers. One of the course writers was invited to the committee meeting as a member representing the point of view of the course writers. After detailed discussions of the battery and its pilot scheme the committee approved the battery in its present form with an imprimatur. The present writer's indebtedness to this committee (2) is great for their very useful remarks, but any mistakes in the battery are his own responsibility.

The nature of the format

The battery comprises four modules of integrated language activities thematically linked, hence it is called "A Modular Thematic Task-Bound Battery". (See Table 1 below).

TABLE 1. THE BATTERY COMPONENTS GENERAL LAY-OUT

Module No.	Theme	Integrated Activities	Performative Aims	No.of Tasks	Time Allowed Hrs.Mins.	Top Level Achievement Scores
1 A,B	Kuwait	R ⟶ W	Reading (for gist, for specific information and for detail) leading to writing.	4	1 30	100
2	Emergencies	W. cued by varied sources	Transcoding information from various written sources into other various types of writing.	4	1 20	100
3	Social Events/ Links	T. cued by varied sources	Talking cued by Reading, guided by Writing and/or Listening. (A telephone message - Language-Transfer).	4	- 45	100
4 A,B	Points of View	L ⟶ W	Listening (for gist, for specific information and for detail) leading to Writing.	4	- 30	100

Code: R = Reading W = Writing T = Talking L = Listening

COMPONENTIAL DESCRIPTION OF EACH MODULE IN TERMS OF TASKS

It may be worth pointing out here that M.1 deals with various types of reading tasks, i.e. for gist, for specific information, for detail, and for reconstruction of a written discourse (cloze). (See Table 2 below).

TABLE 2. COMPONENTS OF M.1

Module and Theme	Task No.	Component Tasks: Task Type & Aim	Time: Hrs.Mins	Alternative/Parallel Forms: Group A	Group B
1 Kuwait A,B	1	Form filling, (though irrelevant to this module, and definitely relevant to module 2, yet by necessity it should appear at the very beginning of the test according to the ordering/arrangement of the battery to provide the testees' personal data	- 10	Same form with data arrangement different from Group B	Same form with data arrangement different from Group A
	2	Scanning a text for information (i.e. selective reading) and information transfer (interpretation of tabulation) and elicitation and writing in note form	- 25	Same text as B but question requisites are different from though equal to B	Same text as A but question requisites are different from though equal to A
	3	Cloze - procedures Reconstruction of a text with every 10th word deleted. (Knowledge of language hollistically and of the flow of discourse).	- 45	Uniform	Uniform
	4	Skimming a text for gist and giving a title (i.e. - compression of information in a nutshell).	- 05	Different (from B) though equal text with identical question requisite	Different (from A) though equal text with identical question requisite

M.2. deals with various types of writing tasks, i.e. extended writing, compressed writing (telegraphese), writing to report events/accidents, to express feelings, or reactions to events and accidents, writing to warn and writing to transform information from one language into another ... etc. (see Table 3 below).

TABLE 3. COMPONENTS OF M.2

Module and Theme	Task No	Component Tasks Task Type & Aim	Time Hrs	 Mins	Alternative/ Parallel forms Group A Group B
2 Emergencies	1	- Writing a letter/reporting to a newspaper. - Transcoding information from note into detail. - Reading and interpretation of forms leading to description of events/accidents in detailed writing		- 30	UNIFORM MODULAR FORMAT SINCE THE ACTIVITIES REQUIRED OF TESTEES ARE OF INDIVIDUAL PRODUCTIVE NATURE
	2	- Writing telegraphese - Transcoding information from notes into a telegram form by compression		- 15	
	3	- Guided writing cued by reading. - Generation of information from given information. (Generation of warning from advice). - Writing to warn others against possible dangers - Inference		- 20	
	4	- Language Information transfer - (Translating)		- 15	

M.3 deals with talking cued by varied sources contextualized in a long-distance telephone conversation where the testee plays the part of the conversation initiator while the part played by the second interlocutor is provided on the tape and in the test booklet. (See Table 4 below).

TABLE 4. COMPONENTS OF M.3

Module and Theme	Task No.	Component Tasks Task Type & Aim	Time Hrs Mins	Alternative/ Parallel forms Group A Group B
3 Social Events	1	- Making notes in preparation for the focal task	- 15	UNIFORM MODULAR FORMAT SINCE ACTIVITIES ARE OF AN INDIVIDUAL PRODUCTIVE NATURE
	2	- Filling in a missing part on a dialogue format in preparation for the main task	- 15	
	3	- A telephone call (transmitting a telephone message)	- 1½	
	4	- Language information transfer (integration of L1 and L2 in an interpretation context).	- 10 (preparation) and - 1 (actual performance)	

The setting for this test is the language laboratory for the following reasons:-

1. It is neither practical nor psychologically healthy to test natural communication in a classroom test situation by establishing an interviewing committee. It is thought to have a psychological pressure on the subject which might block the ability to speak, at least with introverts or shy personalities. As Cronbach (Cronbach, 1964:30) writes, "Any test performance depends on both ability and personality."

2. The telephone conversation simulated in the language laboratory is a maximum approximation to the situation in real life while the pressure of the testing situation on the testee is minimized. The headphone and microphones bear considerable resemblance to the telephone set in terms of function and hypothetical use.

3. Conducting the test in the language laboratory allows for 30 subjects to perform their tasks in the test at the same time, which is an aspect of practicality.

4. The difficulty level of real life communicative situation

with "unpredictability" (Morrow, 1979) as one of its features, is reduced by providing the testee with the second part of the conversation to suit the target level which is not an ultimate proficiency one.

Module 4 deals with various levels of listening (i.e. for gist, for specific information and for detail) testing the understanding of spoken English. (See Table 5 below).

TABLE 5. COMPONENTS OF M.4

Module and Theme	Task No.	Component Tasks Task Type & Aim	Time Hrs	Time Mins	Alternative/ Parallel forms Group A	Alternative/ Parallel forms Group B
4 Points of View A,B	1, 2 & 3	Based on listening answering (in writing) three pre-listening questions on gist, specific information and detail successively.	-	18	Same listening passage as for B with different though equal focusing	Same listening passage as for A with different though equal focusing
	4	On the basis of listening - expressing personal opinion and reasoning in an extended piece of writing	-	12		

This module is conducted in the language laboratory as well. A contextualized taped conversation between a father and a daughter on the advantages and disadvantages of T.V. in our modern life is played. The purpose of the listening is set for the subjects by the pre-listening questions in the test booklet. Each question focuses attention on a certain aspect of the dialogue and is designed to provide information about testees' abilities in a specific listening type.

Modules 1 and 4 were designed in two alternative or parallel forms differently arranged from but equal to each other in terms of types and levels of tasks. This was done for the following reasons:

1. security purposes, i.e. to prevent cheating or copying, and
2. future reliability studies, i.e. parallel test correlation.

Modules 2 and 3 are uniform since the tasks required of testees are of a considerably individual nature and not liable to cheating or copying.

The battery is accompanied by an administration and scoring

manual comprising ten sections to introduce the test to teachers and administrators and to guide the administration procedures, clearly and in detail. It also includes assessment scales, expected and/or acceptable answers to each task, the tape script, and data collection and feedback getting forms.

It could be said that the focus in this battery is on higher order language abilities. One of the fundamental requirements is to establish what the subjects can do with language at the specified level and how well they can perform defined tasks, rather than comparing them with one another. With reference to the syllabus design and the nature of the course, the type of tests which were judged to be more suitable were those provided by this battery i.e. direct types. However, for experimental reasons, a form of less direct type of test i.e. the Cloze was built into it for comparison and correlational studies.

Administration

The sample/the test population:

The battery was administered in April-May, 1983 to 460 male and female students (14-16 years) of 12 secondary schools in both Kuwait and the U.K. distributed as follows:

Number of Schools:	12	(10 in Kuwait and 2 in Britain)
Number of Subjects:	460	(370 in Kuwait and 90 in Britain)
Age group:	14-16 years	
Nationality groups:	3 Groups	(Kuwaitis, non-Kuwaiti Arabs and British)
Sex:	184 boys)	from Kuwait
	186 girls)	
	15 boys)	from Britain
	75 girls)	

The sample was randomly chosen in Britain and Kuwait, and test-taking took place on a purely voluntary basis on the part of the subjects. Students were told that it was an experimental test and would have no effect on their results at the end of the year. The pilot scheme generally aimed at testing the tests.

Administration of the battery in Britain actually aimed at 1. validating the test language, and 2. providing a model of performance and an inventory of the responses to the test tasks by native speakers of the same age group and presumably conceptual level as our subjects in Kuwait. Administration of the battery in Kuwait aimed at collecting adequate data for various validation and reliability studies. As the test had to be administered in each Kuwaiti school simultaneously, the preparation for this particular arrangement took a whole very busy week before the days assigned for actual test-taking by learners/testees. The actual administration of the battery was spread over three days, one for each of modules one and two and a day for both modules three and four.

Before actually administering the battery in Kuwait, it was introduced to all cadres of the Ministry of Education who are concerned with English language teaching. Meetings were held with the ELT Inspectorate to introduce the test, explain its rationale, discuss its format and components. They were invited to give their judgement of the battery as a whole, and of its relevance to the syllabus and course objectives and its suitability to the specified target level. Aware of the fact that any standardized written instructions can become no more than words on paper if procedures are unstandardized, meetings with Inspectors and later with head teachers and teachers in the ten schools of the pilot schemes were called. These meetings aimed at standardization of procedures to guard against possible indefinite individual interpretations of the administration and data collecting plan. Meetings were held as well with the officers of the Educational Technology Department of the Ministry of Education to check that the language laboratories in the pilot scheme schools were working, to provide tapes for recording students' performance and stand-by technicians as a precautionary measure against failure of any tape recorder in any laboratory. During the meetings, the battery constructor had to explain, more than anything else, why the test rubrics were introduced in both English and Arabic throughout the battery at that level. It was made clear that the aim is to neutralize any possibility of the learners misunderstanding the instructions. The point at issue is the performance of the task for which the testees are assessed.

After administration, more meetings were held for standardization of scoring procedures. The scoring system and assessment scale (see table 6 below) were discussed in detail, and the minutes of these meetings were taken for documentation of the event and the views of those present. On the basis of the views expressed in these trial scoring and standardization meetings, it was felt necessary to provide further detailed and more analytical scoring system.

TABLE 6. GENERAL ASSESSMENT SCALE FOR LEVEL SIX

ALTERNATIVE 1

Broad Grade	Range/	%	Result/ Decision	Detail
A	Excellent Achievement	91-100	Proceed to next level	- Distinctive achievement against the criterion performative level. - Message delivered appropriately and correctly even beyond the criterion level.

Broad Grade	Range		%	Result/ Decision	Detail
B	Good Achiever	B+	81-90	Proceed to next level.	- A very good achievement against the criterion performative level. Message delivered fairly well (appropriately and free from mistakes) just conforming within the criterion level, touching lightly the toleration line.
		B	71-80	Proceed to next level after short course	- A good achievement against the criterion performative level. Message conveyed reasonably clearly but with slight mistakes not much interfering with message comprehensibility. Something better is conceivable.
C	Satisfactory Fair	C+	61-70	Proceed to next level after detailed remedial course	- Satisfactory achievement against the criterion performative level. Message conveyed with some difficulty, hence understood with some difficulty, but partly distorted by some mistakes. Just about average.
	Modest	C	51-60	Borderline Case	- Needs re-consideration
D	Unsatisfactory achiever	D	41-50	Resit the test before long/next session	- Underachiever with reference to criterion performative level. Message obscured by mistakes which make it incomprehensible. Generally below satisfactory. Cannot be promoted to next level. Should resit the exam. the next session. Remediation needs to be intensive.
	Non-achiever/ Grossly underachieving	D-	-41	Resit the test after one year	- Non achievement or gross under achievement. No prospect of immediate remediation exists. Should re-do the course and consequently re-sit the test after one year.

Data Analysis plans and its aims

Analysis of data is underway to find out whether the battery tested what it was intended to test, how well the different subtests and/or tasks have performed and to examine the various aspects of test reliability as applicable to this battery. Inter- and intra-modules' correlational studies are planned as well as inter- and intra-rater reliability research. Statistical analyses and otherwise will also be carried out to determine internal consistency, particularly with the alternative form or the parallel test as applied to M1 & 4. Point bi-serial correlations will be carried out between performances of males and females, Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti Arabs, etc.

The battery as it stands is not a panacea. It is a serious attempt at contributing to the development of English language testing. Relevant analysis may determine its value and prove or disprove its validity and reliability. Consequently it will help to decide whether the approach is useful or otherwise; whether the attempt is worthwile or not; and which tasks to retain and which to discard from the final format.

It may be worthwhile to point out here that some aspects of validity are built from the outset into the test and throughout the construction and administration. As far as content validity is concerned the objectives of the course are the test criteria. The tasks were sampled from the syllabus; the course writers examined the battery and approved of it as testing their course; and the practising teachers and inspectors examined it and the majority admitted the considerable degree of coverage of the sample. With reference to face validity the battery was highly acceptable to its consumers. However, some aspects of validity are not applicable to this battery, e.g. concurrent and predictive validity because 1. no acknowledged standardized test of the same course exists so far for concurrent validation, and 2. it is not a proficiency test with a predictive outlook but an achievement test with retrospective perspective.

Conclusion

Compared with the current practices in test construction in Kuwait, the present battery breaks new ground by the very nature of its construction and arrangement of tasks in modules, themes and parallel sub-tests. It is hoped that post-pilot data analysis will prove its worth.

Notes

1 J.B. Carroll referred to this particular situation in the Arab Gulf States on various occasions. See in particular Carroll, J.B., 1982 "Is there another way?" In J.B. Heaton (ed)

"Language Testing", Modern English Publications Ltd., U.K., 1982.

2 The Committee Members were:-

- Dr R.R.K. Hartmann, Director of The Language Centre
- Mr G.C. James, the former Supervisor of the project
- Mr C. Weir, the current Supervisor of the project
- Mr T. O'Neill, one of the C.E.C. writers
- The Present Researcher

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